

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 1026

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDEV, PDIP, PINS, CN, US

SUBJ: MERCENARIES, FEDERALISM, RELIGION, AND RECOGNITION

REF: A)ANTANARIVO 992; B) ANTANANARIVO 095

1. JUNE 3 LOCAL PRESS CARRIED AFP ARTICLE CONCERNING ROLE OF FRENCH MERCENARY BOB DENARD IN RECENT OVERTHROW OF COMORIAN GOVERNMENT. MY ONLY SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON DENARD IS CONTAINED IN FREDERICK FORSYTH'S "THE DOGS OF WAR" WHICH I RECENTLY READ. MOST INTERESTING PARTS OF AFP ARTICLE ARE A) DENARD'S CLAIM, AND WRITER'S SKEPTICISM THEREIN, THAT EXPEDITION CAME AROUND CAPE OF GOOD HOPE RATHER THAN FROM NEARBY COUNTRY, AND B) FACT DENARD IS NOW PLAYING ROLE IN GOVERNING OF COUNTRY.

2. FRENCH OFFICIALS IN MADAGASCAR ARE ENCOURAGED BY FEDERAL APPELATION OF NEW REGIME (REF B) . THEY BELIEVE IT MAY ALLOW FOR THE EVENTUAL REINTERGRATION OF MAYOTTE INTO THE COMORIAN REPUBLIC IF THE INHABITANTS OF THIS ISLAND CAN COUNT ON CONTINUING TO RUN THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.

3. REASSERTION OF COMOROS AS AN "ISLAMIC REPUBLIC" (REF B) IS BEING ACCOMPANIED, ACCORDING TO EYEWITNESSES, BY AN EXTREME RETURN TO TRADITIONAL HABITS: VEILS FOR THE WOMEN, MUCH HAND KISSING OF AHMED ABDALLAH, ETC. SOME OBSERVERS FEAR THAT SUCH A

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REGRESSION WILL DO NOTHING BUT EXACERBATE SCHISM BETWEEN MODERN YOUNG AND TRADITIONAL ELDERS, WITH UNFAVORABLE COSEQUENCES FOR THE PROSPECTS OF STABILITY. ALTHOUGH MANY COMORIANS WERE OPPOSED TO SOME OF ALI SOILIH'S ALLEGED EXTREMISM IN THE OTHER DIRECTION, THERE WAS A GENUINE DESIRE AMONG MUCH OF THE POPULATION TO GET AWAY FROM THE MORE ARCHAIC ASPECTS OF ISLAM AS PRACTICED IN THE COMOROS.

4. COMMENT: ROLE OF MERCENARY LEADER IN NEW GOVERNMENT,ITS
REPORTED REGRESSION TO ARCHAIC RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL HABITS,
AND THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF ALI SOILIH ARGUE AGAINST ANY HASTE
ON OUR PART IN THE REESTABLISHMENT OF A WORKING RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE US AND THE COMOROS. AS THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS SO FAR
SHOWN NO SIGH SOLLICITING RECOGNITION WE ARE IN GOOD POSITION TO
CONTINUE TO ASSESS NEW LEADERSHIP WITHOUT NECESSITY FOR COMMITTING
OURSELVES. MY WESTERN EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES IN ANTANANARIVO,
ACCREDITED TO THE COMOROS, ARE ALSO IN NO HURRY TO MOVE IN THIS
DIRECTION.

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